



CHAPTER FOUR

Where We Go From Here: How to Achieve Smarter Growth

People from all walks of life—business leaders, citizens and public officials—are starting to make smart growth a reality in communities across the country. These people have recognized the potential benefits and they’re making things happen.

However, achieving smarter growth is not easy. Neither the problems of sprawl nor the solutions to these problems are simple. No single policy or program can guarantee the quality of life benefits that are the ultimate goal of smart growth. And no single person, business, agency or level of government can do the job by itself. Everyone has a role to play, and success requires a team effort.

For example, tax and spending policies that drive sprawl exist at all levels of government. Correcting these at the local level will have a limited effect if state action is not forthcoming. Innovations in federal transportation policy could help shape growth for the better, but they

won’t work if state agencies stay wedded to road building and leery of alternatives. Model building codes drafted at the state level will have little effect without enforcement by local governments. Ensuring that neighborhood improvements actually benefit residents instead of pricing them out won’t happen without tangible steps to prevent housing displacement.

Opportunities to spur smart growth abound; almost everyone can do something.

A SMART GROWTH AGENDA The basic pieces of the smart growth puzzle are described in the following pages. Although these policies and actions are important, they are not the only way. Dozens of other options exist, and are being tried around the country. Each of the policies discussed here has been tried somewhere with success.



Local Governments

REWRITE LOCAL GROWTH PLANS Local comprehensive plans govern most aspects of growth—where building can occur, what densities and uses are allowed, where open space will be. To guide growth, some communities have set aside zones for green space. Others charge development fees to pay for local services, with builders paying little or nothing if they pursue smart growth projects, such as developments that will accommodate a range of uses and income levels. Without sensible local plans, smart growth will never achieve its full potential.

PURSUE TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES Although state and federal funding dominates transportation, local governments have a key role. Federal and state transportation funds flow only after years of work by local people to plan, design and build community support for a project. Many of the small but important investments that make walking and biking practical alternatives—sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike parking—are prime targets for local action. So are transit programs to link workers to job opportunities.

AVOID SCHOOL SPRAWL In too many communities, school districts contribute to sprawl by replacing neighborhood schools with larger new schools far away from the communities they serve. Site specifications used by school boards



often require huge contiguous parcels of land for athletic fields and parking for any new school, and infill sites in older communities are often out of the running before site selection begins. School districts should re-examine these requirements and seek to build schools in the neighborhoods that they serve. Also, more funding should be made available to rehabilitate older schools which are valuable community assets.

PROVIDE MORE HIGH QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING Housing affordability is becoming a major problem across the country, particularly for families with lower incomes. Local governments can adopt ordinances that require some portion of new developments to consist of affordable units. The *Smart Growth America* poll shows 66 percent public support for requiring that 15 percent of all new units be affordable. Local governments can also support the preservation of the existing supply of affordable homes.

ADOPT “SMART” BUILDING CODES Modern building codes can be a barrier to rebuilding older communities. They often require an entire building to be brought up to modern standards before any part of it can be used, forming a barrier to the small businesses and others that are often the leaders in revitalizing older neighborhoods.

AFTER

Martin Luther King Historic District
Atlanta

BEFORE



State Government

FOCUS STATE SPENDING ON EXISTING COMMUNITIES State funding policy can be a powerful tool for encouraging development in the right places and discouraging it in the wrong places. Whether state funds are for highways, schools, wastewater treatment or state office buildings, a fiscally responsible and equitable smart growth screen on spending is a logical first step for state action.

ENACT A STATE GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN Although local planning for growth is key, sometimes state action is necessary to keep competition among local governments from undermining smart growth. State policies can establish regional zones that are off limits to development or other policies to protect open space and guide development to areas that already have good public transportation and other services.

FUND ALTERNATIVES TO DRIVING States take the lead in funding most transportation projects. Almost all states have funding sources dedicated to roads, but few offer similar funding for alternatives to roads. In addition, state enthusiasm for road building can frustrate local smart growth efforts. State support is often the key to

maintaining public transit systems and offering more high-quality services where they are needed, particularly in lower income communities. States can lift restrictions which prohibit the use of state gas tax revenues to support public transit and walking and cycling facilities. They can also establish programs that coordinate transportation and land use plans and help get low-income workers to job locations.

PRESERVE OPEN SPACE In many regions of the country, state government has been an important partner in efforts to preserve open space. This can come through land purchase programs that protect green areas or tax policies that help farmers, ranchers and others keep their land in production. Programs to preserve working lands can be key to assuring the continued viability of rural economies. Also, preserving neighborhood parks and gardens is critical for enhancing the quality of life in urban communities

PROTECT HISTORIC DISTRICTS. State tax credits and other policies can assist businesses and homeowners in making the investments necessary to revitalize historic neighborhoods. Efforts to protect the integrity of historic communities across the country have provided the spark needed to revitalize many older urban neighborhoods.



The Federal Government

SPUR BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT One key to promoting infill development and urban revitalization is to modernize the way we reuse potentially contaminated industrial sites. Investors seeking to redevelop such sites need guidelines and assurances to make projects straightforward and predictable. Similarly, residents of nearby communities need assurances that environmental standards are being met and that they are involved in the decision making. Without such measures, even the slightest hint of problems can prevent these properties from being returned to the tax rolls.

PROTECT OPEN SPACE AND SCENIC LANDSCAPES Federal interest in land protection has a long history, but funding has not kept up with demand. From National Parks to wildlife habitat, federal efforts to protect key pieces of land should match the efforts being made at the state and local level. Public officials should also fight to preserve the cherished scenic vistas that make our communities special and drive our growing tourism industry. In particular, the federal government should ease restrictions limiting communities' ability to fight billboard blight.

REFOCUS TRANSPORTATION POLICY For the last 50 years, federal transportation policy has focused on highways. A new commitment of federal funding to provide people with alternatives to roads, from reliable bus services to bike lanes, can give communities the boost they need to make



these projects happen. More funding should be devoted to improving public transit access between homes and jobs. Also, our federal commitment to the country's unfinished rail systems and greenways should match the commitments made in the past to highways and airports.

SUPPORT HOUSING PROGRAMS The federal government is an important partner in ensuring access to housing for low-income families. The buying power of key federal programs has eroded over time, and our ability to assure adequate housing is falling further behind market needs. The federal government can support housing programs by providing a larger low-income housing tax credit, helping states establish affordable housing trust funds, providing more assistance for subsidized housing, and linking housing to job opportunities through public transportation programs.

ADOPT SMART GROWTH TAX INCENTIVES The federal government could provide a variety of tax credits and other incentives to support smart growth. Tax credits for transit-oriented development, preservation of historic buildings and investments in distressed neighborhoods could help communities around the country achieve their smart growth goals.

State enthusiasm for road building can frustrate local smart growth efforts.

Private Sector

DEVELOPERS: BUILD PLACES WITH VARIETY
New flexibility in zoning is allowing developers to plan and build projects that include mixed-income housing, retail, services and offices together. Such a blending of uses can create built-in markets for retail businesses, offer residents the convenience of nearby stores, and make transit feasible. Transit station areas offer prime opportunities for this kind of new development.

BANKS: SUPPORT INNOVATIVE PROJECTS
Even as local governments and builders have begun to see the value of smart growth, some financial institutions have been reluctant to provide capital for these projects. Recent growth in projects that blend an array of building uses should give banks the confidence they need to back them.

BUSINESSES: LOCATE IN COMMUNITIES WITH TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS
Businesses that opt for smart growth communities over isolated office parks can reap benefits for their workers and their bottom lines. Giving employees the option of commuting by transit or living close to work can increase satisfaction and reduce turnover. Locating businesses closer to the local work force reduces the risks associated with labor shortages.



Citizens

SUPPORT SMART GROWTH BALLOT INITIATIVES
In many cases, state and local governments are either unable or unwilling to adopt key policies. This means that smart growth issues are often decided directly by voters. Strong citizen support for proposals for everything from zones for open space to transit can put these policies into place and send a signal to political leaders about what people really want.

CONSIDER NEIGHBORHOODS WITH TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS
Families can save money and avoid traffic delays by living in communities that offer access by multiple means of transportation. These areas combine a mix of destinations—stores, housing and jobs—that are accessible by car, transit, foot or bike. Higher housing prices in some communities of this kind can be offset by the substantially lower cost for transportation achieved by owning fewer cars.

SUPPORT NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESSES
Living in communities that have shops within walking distance gives residents the option of supporting stores located nearby rather than distant superstores. This keeps resources close to home, keeps neighborhood stores in business, and helps preserve the qualities that make close-knit neighborhoods great places to live.

Endnotes

- p. 6: Pew Center for Civic Journalism (<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/spotlight/displaySpotlight.php3?id=28>)
- p. 7: Transit figures from the American Public Transportation Association. Driving figures from the Federal Highway Administration. *Figures for 2000 are based on partial data for that year. Driving figures are for the first 5 months of the year (see *Traffic Volume Trends*, May 2000, Federal Highway Administration). Transit figures are for the first 3 months of the year, as reported by the nation's transit agencies to the American Public Transportation Association. Ballot data from Phyllis Myers, *Livability at the Ballot Box: State and Local Referenda on Parks, Conservation, and Smarter Growth, Election Day 1998*, Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (www.brookings.edu/ES/urban/myers.pdf).
- p. 9: National Governors' Association (<http://www.nga.org/Pubs/Policies/NR/nr13.asp>).
- p. 10: Arthur C. Nelson, "Effects of Urban Containment on Housing Prices and Landowner Behavior," Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, *Land Lines*, May 2000 (<http://www.lincolnst.edu/landline/2000/may/may1.html>)
- p. 11: Real estate analysis cited is *Emerging Trends in Real Estate 2000*, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Lend Lease Real Estate Investment, Inc., October 11, 1999. Sprawl City reference is Robert Bullard, Glenn Johnson and Angel Torres, eds., *Sprawl City: Race, Politics, and Planning in Atlanta*, Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000. "Cost of community services" research conducted by the American Farmland Trust, *Saving American Farmland: What Works*. Northampton, Mass.: American Farmland Trust, 1997 (<http://www.farmlandinfo.org/fic/tas/index.htm#fs>).
- p. 12: Rutgers University reference is Robert W. Burchell and David Listokin, "Land, Infrastructure, Housing Costs, and Fiscal Impacts Associated with Growth," Paper prepared for the conference Rail-Volution '96: Building Successful Communities with Rail, Washington, DC, September 8, 1996. EPA study is G. Anderson and W. Schroer, "The Impacts of Infill vs. Greenfield Development: A Comparative Case Study Analysis," US Environmental Protection Agency, publication # 231-R-99-005, September 2, 1999. For community safety reference, see American Farmland Trust, *op. cit.* New Jersey figures from the Maryland Department of Planning (<http://www.op.state.md.us/>). CRA and HMDA information from the Enterprise Foundation and the Center for Community Change.
- p. 13: New Urbanism discussion from the Congress for the New Urbanism (www.cnu.org). ULI cite is Mark Eppli and Charles Tu, *Valuing the New Urbanism: The Impact of the New Urbanism on Prices of Single-Family Homes*, Urban Land Institute, 1999.
- p. 14: Code and ordinance discussion is drawn from Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, New York: North Point Press, 2000.
- p. 15: Envision Utah information is from Calthorpe Associates (www.calthorpe.com) and Envision Utah (www.envisionutah.org). Cite for Maryland law is Department of Planning, *op. cit.*
- p. 16: Austin information from the City of Austin Smart Growth Initiative (<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/smartgrowth/>). Park DuValle source is Urban Design Associates.
- p. 17: Rochester and Denver source is the Enterprise Foundation. Safe Routes to School information from the Surface Transportation Policy Project (www.transact.org). LEM cite is www.locationefficiency.com.
- p. 18: Trails discussion from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (www.railtrails.org). Crossings discussion from Calthorpe Associates, *op. cit.*
- p. 19: New Jersey information from the *Bergen Record* (www.bergen.com/region/farms10200008106.htm). Anacostia discussion from "Communities Gaining Access to Capital," PolicyLink and Urban Habitat Program for the Community Capital Investment Initiative, forthcoming 2000. Atlantic Steel discussion from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/projectxl/atlantic/022499.htm>).

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